

Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative Assignment

The National Capital Planning Commission, along with other agencies in the Washington, D.C. area, recently decided to launch the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative. The historic Pennsylvania Avenue has served multiple purposes: from representing American political power to being a venue for citizens to publicly protest against unwanted policies. The aim of this project is to develop a vision in which the Avenue will be able to “meet local and national needs in a 21st century capital city.”¹ Such a goal can be accomplished by advancing the concept of the Triple Bottom Line.

The 21st century represents a changing time with many challenges that must be met for sustainable urban development. Since 2010, it is estimated that half of the world’s population lives in urban areas. Hence, one of the many challenges of this century is to create urban spaces with enough capacity to cater to new residents. However, these urban areas must do so in a manner that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”² In addition, other factors such as building spacing and climates should be taken into consideration.

With the above statements in mind, I propose closing off Pennsylvania Avenue to traffic. This will allow for pedestrians to take full advantage of the street. Included in this proposal would be a minimal form of public transportation that will allow for pedestrians in a rush to travel from one end of Pennsylvania Avenue to the other. The added space in central Washington, D.C. will further allow for community events to take place that appreciate various disciplines such as the arts.

A functional purpose will be served in closing off Pennsylvania Avenue to car traffic: it will result in the reduction of Washington, D.C.’s carbon footprint. This idea originates from the decision of Rome’s mayor, Ignazio Marino, to close off the main road to the Colosseum “in order to protect... structures from pollution and ruin.”³ A ban on cars on Pennsylvania Avenue will deter drivers from choosing to use their car when other suitable transportation options exist. Like Rome, it will be proposed that vehicles such as bicycles, electric buses, and emergency vehicles (i.e. police cars and ambulances) will still be able to operate on Pennsylvania Avenue.⁴

The idea of allowing Pennsylvania Avenue to become a venue for community events stems from the fact that Washington, D.C.’s population is approximately 600,000.⁵ The community events taking

¹ NCPC Website <www.ncpc.gov/pennavenue/overview.html>

² Brundtland Report (1987)

³ The Telegraph <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10220434/Mayor-of-Rome-risks-driver-fury-as-he-closes-road-to-Colosseum.html>>

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ <http://www.ipl.org/div/stateknow/popchart.html#statesbypop>

place on Pennsylvania Avenue will foster an intimate environment for native Washingtonians. Furthermore, the historical significance of the street will resonate with any historically conscious citizens. Hosting events on the Avenue will become a point of pride and honor for anyone involved. For example, a closed off Pennsylvania Avenue will be able to host a gathering of artists, either nation-wide or city-specific, during the summer in order to display contemporary art outdoors. The idea comes from the *biennale* art show in Venice that takes place annually.⁶ However, the use of Pennsylvania Avenue is not solely for outdoor art exhibits. The community may take advantage of an open street with great historical significance for other social events such as music festivals. The Washington, D.C. community could also utilize the extra space for the purpose of hosting farmer's markets on the weekends and allowing restaurants and bars to open outdoor spaces along the Avenue.

This plan fulfills the Triple Bottom Line criteria established in the 1996 United Nations City Summit Habitat Agenda. First, the use of Pennsylvania Avenue for art exhibits and other events appreciating culture fulfills the social component. Second, closing off the street to cars but allowing a minimal public transport system (by use of small electric buses) completes the environmental focus of the Triple Bottom Line. Third, the savings from traffic regulation, gas in cars, and the deterrence of drivers to drive vehicles will fulfill the economic goal by reducing gas consumption and time delayed by traffic and finding parking spaces.⁷

In conclusion, the National Capital Planning Commission's Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative provides a wonderful opportunity for Washington, D.C. to advance the Triple Bottom Line concept. The ideas that I have provided originate from the recent ventures of mayors in the major Italian cities (i.e. Rome, Florence, etc.) who have attempted to preserve historical sites while enhancing their social, economic, and environmental use. It is precisely like this that the National Capital Planning Commission may begin to use Pennsylvania Avenue to "meet local and national needs in a 21st century capital city."⁸



⁶ RawVision Website <<http://rawvision.com/news/outsider-artists-venice-biennale>>

⁷ United Nations City Summit Habitat Agenda, Chapter 1, June 1996, Pg. 1 (from slideshow presented on 3 September 2014 in Global Social Activism lecture)

⁸ NCPC Website <www.ncpc.gov/pennavenue/overview.html>